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SUBJECT: BOTSWANA YOUTH STRUGGLE WITH UNEMPLOYMENT

¶1. SUMMARY: Botswana's youth face a lack of both training and job opportunities, creating situations of poverty that can lead to commercial sex work, HIV/AIDS, and anti-social behavior. Despite a significant problem of commercial sex work, none of our contacts have heard of scenarios in which individuals were compelled by force, fraud or coercion into that situation. Some local organizations have begun to formulate innovative solutions to all these challenges. Mission supports such efforts through the Ambassador's Special Self-Help Fund. END SUMMARY.

UNEMPLOYMENT IS HIGH

¶2. A common theme heard in Francistown, Kasane, Maun, and Ghanzi during recent Embassy visits was the problem of unemployment, especially youth unemployment. Although the official unemployment level is 24%, that figure underestimates the magnitude of unemployment and fails to capture an apparently large number of underemployed, who make less than the austere poverty line income of 600 pula (US \$100) a month. The District Commissioner in Francistown, Mrs. Sylvia Muzila, acknowledged widespread unemployment in her area. Although Batswana often blame cheap illegal labor from Zimbabwe, she asserted that unemployed Batswana actually lack not only job opportunities, but skills and the drive to work hard. In a separate conversation, Francistown Mayor Mr. Buti Billy, confirmed Mrs. Muzila's account to EmbOffs, stating that many in his city are either unemployed or underemployed. The remarkable proliferation of cash loan businesses charging upwards of 19% interest per month (EmbOffs counted at least 11 in a space of six blocks) in Francistown testified to the low incomes, lack of assets, and economic desperation associated with high unemployment.

¶3. Botswana National Youth Council (BNYC) members in Maun, a jumping off point for tourists visiting the Okavango Delta, complained that employment opportunities are few and limited by the need for prior work experience. Similarly, Mr. Otto Gasewagae, head of the Kasane chapter of the BNYC, stated that youth from the Chobe region who lack proper training migrate to Kasane, another tourist destination, in search of jobs, which are rare. They often end up on the streets, drinking or working in the commercial sex sector. In an effort to combat this high youth unemployment rate, the BNYC has worked with hotels in the area to start an internship program that provides appropriate training, documented with a certificate of completion. Often the hotels take on the interns as employees. Although the program is expanding to include more hotels, the tourism industry can only absorb so many youth.

INADEQUATE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR BOTSWANA YOUTH

¶4. Employers also criticized the lack of adequate skills

training in Botswana. Mr. Iqbal Ibrahim, President of BOCCIM, said that there are the academic graduates and the uneducated, but nobody to fill the huge hole in-between. The lack of skilled workers or artisans was a common complaint among business leaders throughout Botswana. When employers do find a tradesperson, often he/she is willing only to do one task, e.g. brick-laying, but refuses to do associated tasks, such as mixing the cement. As a result, companies prefer to bring in labor that will be more flexible and efficient. Similarly, Botswana's training institutes seem to produce low-productivity workers. Mr. John Riley, a general contractor in Maun, observed for example that the Brigades, a network of vocational training centers, teach students to lay 100 bricks a day, when employers expect them to lay around 1000 bricks per day.

¶5. In Kasane, where senior secondary school access is limited, the Brigade, which only accepts 100 students at a time, is the only training option for youth. The Brigade has also been roundly criticized by our business community contacts for not training the students in marketable skills. In Maun, BNYC members who aspired to entrepreneurship felt constrained by their lack of business skills training and by government obstructions to start-ups - particularly the relatively costly and slow processes to procure a business name, a business license, land, and seed capital.

THE REALITIES OF UNEMPLOYMENT: COMMERCIAL SEX

¶6. A common theme that ran through many meetings in Francistown, Kasane, and Maun was the problem of commercial sex work. EmbOffs repeatedly heard that the youths' circumstances, especially unemployment and poverty, drove them to commercial sex work. Contacts in Maun observed that many youths move to Maun to find a job in the tourist

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industry but because the competition for work is so stiff and they are cut off from family support, they often turn to commercial sex work to survive. Prostitution is also rife in Kazangula, where truckers often wait idly for days in order to cross the Chobe River on a ferry to enter Zambia.

NO INDICATION OF TRAFFICKING

¶7. Significantly, none of our contacts from several NGOs had heard of people compelled into sex work by force, fraud or coercion. The Matshelo Community Development Association (MCDA), which works with 'at risk' populations, including commercial sex workers, to prevent the spread of HIV, as well as representatives of the Red Cross and African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnership (ACHAP), said it had encountered no instances of trafficking.

COMMENT

¶8. As more young people migrate to the cities in search of work, the problems associated with youth unemployment will only continue to grow. Government has attempted to provide Brigade training, especially in brick-laying, welding, typing, etc, but has fallen short of the mark. The training provided is often misaligned with the true needs of industries. Faced with unemployment and a feeling of disenfranchisement, some youth turn to commercial sex work to survive. While the GOB is working hard to stem HIV/AIDS, failure to successfully address youth unemployment can reinforce that trend and contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Recognizing this threat, the Mission will continue to use the limited resources of its Ambassador's Special Self-Help Fund to encourage and support creative solutions to the challenges facing Botswana's youth.

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